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Mode of application.

In all cases the method of administration is the same. The leaves, all of which must be of one of the three kinds mentioned, are broken up and placed in a basin made out of a number of umbrella-palm leaves, into which water is also poured and a red-hot stone put in to heat it. The leafy basin is then folded up for a short time, during which the water draws out the juices from the leaves. In folding up the basin the leaves forming it are so manipulated that a kind of spout is left, by means of which the infusion is then poured over the wound, after which the packet is opened and placed beneath the wound so that the steam rising from it shall continue to play around and soothe it.[1] As each packet is opened, the tutor addresses the novice and, pointing at the leaf from which the infusion has been made, says, "You see this leaf. You used to call it (e.g.) *rŏmbi*. Well, its real name is *mov-ghat* (the name of a fish). Now you know." The novice dutifully repeats the mock name, and duly pays for the esoteric knowledge with the customary fee of a plaited belt or other small object.

For three days the novices may not drink, nor for four days may they eat puddings.

For the first three days after the operation the novices may not drink water, since the passing of water is both painful and necessitates the too frequent removal of the dressings; nor may they for four days eat puddings, which are considered too rich, but are fed chiefly on roast white yams.[2]

The prohibition against drinking water may also have a ritual significance. It is specifically mentioned in connexion with initiation in all districts, and a similar prohibition is a feature of ritual abstinence on many other occasions, as in gong-making.[3]

To what extent the restrictions on food also, eminently sound as they appear from our point of view, can be said to be based on medical grounds is doubtful, since their application is in all cases ritualised, and as such is regarded by the natives as part of the system of ordeals that the novices have to endure. Thus ritual demands that the restrictions begin and end for all novices at once, irrespective of their individual physical condition.

The raising of the restrictions follows the usual initiatory pattern in that (*a*) a farcical homily is addressed to the novice and (*b*) the novice must pay.

Third Day

Removal of restriction on drinking water. Mock name for water.

The ban on the drinking of water is brought to a close on the evening of the third day, when one of the initiates brings a bambooful of water

[1] Equivalent to a hot fomentation, producing hyperaemia.
[2] The word for roasting is *tun-tun* (Atchin *tu-tun*).
[3] See p. 355.

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and props it up close to the door of the special house. Each novice, with his tutor, is then called out in turn by the leading man, who addresses the novice, saying, "You see this. Up till today you have always called this *nu-we* (the ordinary word for fresh water). This isn't its real name. Its real name is *ne-lum*." This word *lum* is really an adjective meaning "cool," here elevated to the status of a mock secret word. The novice, having learnt that it is better to accept the insult than to risk the displeasure of the initiates, dutifully repeats the word *ne-lum*, pays his fee to the leading man, both for the esoteric knowledge and for the water, and forthwith drinks. The fee consists of some small object such as a plaited belt, or, latterly, a stick of tobacco. The verb describing this and other payments made on similar occasions is *gu-ghugh*.

Fifth Day

Novices run the gauntlet called "Catching rails."

The ban on eating pudding is similarly lifted on the fifth day, but before this a special hoax is performed called *ghore pilagh*, "catching rails." Rails are the long-legged wading birds after which the dance called *Pilagh* is named, a dance performed chiefly by women in connexion with mortuary rites.[1] "Catching rails" is a ritual sport corresponding to that which in Atchin is called *hor-hor mara*, "catching eels," which in that island occurs frequently in mythological tales and is actually performed during initiation, when certain of those previously initiated divide into two parties and ritually "catch eels" all round the island till they converge at the spot on the beach where the novices are awaiting inspection by their mothers' brothers on the day after the operation. The "eels" are represented by long rolls of leaves plucked just before unfolding and dangled from strings attached to bamboo poles which those taking part in the performance from time to time close in on and spear.

Just how "catching rails" is done on Vao I do not know, though the main features of it appear to be the same. The hoax consists in a combination of this motive with what we should regard as the antiseptic measure of sterilising the wound with white ashes, all carried out in the humorously bullying atmosphere that obtains throughout the initiation rites. The initiates form up in two lines in the enclosure outside the house, and the novices, having been told they are going to chase rails, are brought out of the house and made, without penis-wrappers, to run the gauntlet between the two lines of initiates, who, as they run, throw white ashes on to their wounds. The stronger and braver novices run

[1] See p. 323.